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ABSTRACT

The current structure of schools allows teachers to obtain a relatively high degree of personal satisfaction from the work of teaching itself. However, collective bargaining must be concerned almost exclusively with pressing for higher salaries and related issues. With each round of bargaining, higher teacher salaries will be gradually traded off for a higher pupil-to-teacher ratio and a reduction in direct and indirect instructional support. These changes will reduce teachers' engagement with the work of teaching itself; teachers will exchange intrinsic work satisfaction for monetary compensation. This trade-off will have two important consequences: 1) teachers' push for higher salaries will be amplified, and 2) student achievement will be negatively affected. (Author/JG)

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TEACHERS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

by

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Teachers and Collective Bargaining

Louis Terkel in his book Working (1974) informs us that many routine jobs in America today provide workers little in the way of intrinsic work satisfaction. Compensation for work tends to be extrinsic to the work in terms of monetary remuneration rather than personal satisfaction gained through doing the work. There is at least one important exception, however. Although classroom teaching tends to be routine (Jackson, 1968), for the most part, the satisfaction teachers derive from their positions stems from the work itself (Sergiovanni, 1967). Furthermore, Lortie (1969, 1976) concludes that the work involved in classroom teaching tends to be compelling and engrossing.

Lortie (1969-1976) argues persuasively that the organizational structures of the school forces (or allows) teachers personally to turn inward toward their work and find satisfaction in the work itself. For example, the traditional teachers' school salary schedule based on seniority and courses completed, rather than on productivity, reduces administrative influence over teachers and allows teachers to close their classroom doors and turn their attention toward gaining satisfaction through teaching itself. Furthermore, the relatively flat organizational pattern of schools de-emphasizes competition among

teachers allowing them to personally focus on their work with pupils and, at the same time, provides compensation only to a very few in terms of career advancement. The school structure today thus tends to support the personal efforts of teachers in gaining satisfaction from the work of teaching itself while providing few extrinsic incentives -- status, upward career mobility, and, of course, comparatively high salaries.

The principle of unification which teachers' unions must organize around is the principle of providing collective goods to members. Collective goods are those benefits which are shared fairly equally among members and which are unobtainable by members through personal initiative (Olson, 1971). Teachers from different schools and from different levels within a school district will likely propose different points for negotiation, for example, proposals involving curricular matters and proposals stimulated by site building problems. However, only those concerns which a union can transform into collective benefits will, over time, arrive and be negotiated at the bargaining table. The single work benefit which touches all teachers in a district and is obtainable by a teachers' organization, yet is unavailable to individuals through private action, is, of course, salary. Thus it can be expected that teachers' unions in the long run will press continually, and almost exclusively, for higher salaries and related issues -- fringe benefits and work schedules.

It seems reasonable to assume that the funding for public education will continue at a relatively steady state. This is to say public education will not enjoy new rich sources of funding nor will the traditional

sources increase dramatically in the next decade. New demands on a constant supply of resources requires that the pattern of resource allocation be changed. With the legal, unified, constant, and sophisticated press for higher salaries by teachers' unions, it can be expected that there will be some gradual, yet significant, changes in schools to meet the demands of salary increases.

The types of changes which can be expected to occur will be those which will free funds for salaries and related benefits. One change which will likely occur is a decrease in the ratio of classroom teachers to students accomplished by either decreasing the number of teachers on a staff and/or increasing the number of students assigned to each classroom. Since a sizeable proportion of a school district's annual budget is devoted to salaries of teachers, a reduction in the number of teachers and/or an increase of the number of pupils assigned to teachers has the direct implication of freeing funds for salary increases. Another change which is likely to occur is that direct and indirect support for instruction also likely will decrease. For example, less funds will be allocated to curricular materials and classroom supplies, as well as building and grounds maintenance and repair. With each round of bargaining it can be expected that higher teacher salaries will be gradually traded off for a higher pupil to teacher ratio and a reduction in direct and indirect instructional support.

The question now arises: How will these changes, which will likely occur through collective bargaining, affect the classroom

teaching-learning process? In responding to this question, there are at least two ways of looking at possible effects. One way is to examine the implications the changes have for teachers on the nature of the work of classroom teaching. Another way of looking at the effects is to examine the implications for pupil achievement.

First, the teachers' side will be examined. Dan Lortie (1969) tells us that the engaging quality of the work of teaching requires that teachers develop a personal sensitivity to their pupils, have the autonomy to define student achievement, and be able to connect personal action to pupil progress. The important point here is that teachers must develop a close relationship with their pupils. Thus a gradual but steady increase in class sizes coupled with a gradual decrease in institutional support can be expected to reduce the engagement of teachers with the work itself.

Christina Maslach's research (1976) on a sizeable sample of individuals representing a broad range of professions associated with client service occupations lends support to this conclusion. Maslach concludes that professionals who "are forced to care for too many people" often "burn out." Maslach goes on to state: "As the ratio [of clients to practitioners] increases, the result is higher and higher emotional overload until . . . the worker just burns out and emotionally disconnects." Christina Maslach further suggests that professionals with high and demanding caseloads tend to seek avenues of escape from their work.

It can be expected that with an ever increasing pupil to teacher ratio, teachers will experience less intrinsic satisfaction from their work and simultaneously will press for reduced contacts with students through a shorter worday, week, and year. Furthermore, it can be expected that as teachers gradually trade monetary remuneration for less intrinsic work satisfaction, the trade will be amplified continually through the bargaining cycle: higher salaries producing less satisfaction with the work itself and in turn reinforcing the press for higher salaries.

From the pupils' side of the situation, the recent study by Tikunoff, Berliner, and Rist (1975) on teacher effectiveness is enlightening. These investigators, defining teacher effectiveness in terms of pupil achievement, found that the more effective teachers in their study spent more time in active interaction with students than did less effective teachers. Thus is can be reasonably predicted that as teachers' involvement in their work as active classroom participants decreases, pupil achievement will also decline. Likely the educational cliché, "students work no harder than their teachers" holds a lot of truth.

What has been argued in this brief paper can be summed up in the following points: (1) the current structure of schools allows teachers an opportunity to obtain a relatively high degree of personal satisfaction from the work of teaching itself; (2) collective bargaining through unionization must in principle be concerned almost exclusively with monetary remuneration for the work of

teaching; (3) teachers will exchange intrinsic work satisfaction for monetary compensation; and (4) the trade off will have two important consequences: (a) the press by teachers for higher salaries will be amplified; and (b) student achievement will be negatively affected. Thus, what Louis Terkel found among most American workers will likely touch teachers. This is to say teachers will increasingly experience general dissatisfaction with the nature of their work although experience monetary gains.

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